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SUBJECT: PRC POLITICAL OFFICER IN BANGKOK DISCUSSES BURMA

REF: A. BEIJING 6075

[1](#)B. COPE-GREENBERG 9/21/07 E-MAIL

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor David R. Greenberg, reason 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) A Chinese diplomat posted in Bangkok viewed Singapore's strong public line on Burma as unwise and doubted that Burma would be marginalized at the upcoming ASEAN Summit. He saw little possibility that Indonesia could exert meaningful influence on the Burmese regime. The diplomat suggested that the USG should have further bilateral talks with Burma in China and should offer positive incentives to the Burmese government. He indicated PRC Embassy officers did not maintain contact with Burmese exiles in Thailand. He said that, in accordance with the recent Chinese Communist Party's decision to take on more responsibilities in foreign affairs, the PRC government would spend the next year evaluating its ability to influence international events. End Summary.

DISCUSSING BURMA AND ASEAN

[1](#)2. (C) We met on October 26 with Yao Wen, the Director (second highest ranking officer) of the Political and Press Affairs Section of the PRC Embassy in Bangkok. Much of the conversation focused on the situation in Burma. Yao, who appears to follow regional affairs closely, claimed not to have received a readout of UN Special Envoy Gambari's consultations in China.

[1](#)3. (C) Yao -- whom we believe aimed to represent his headquarters' views -- seemed dismayed by Singapore's willingness to condemn openly the recent Burmese crackdown. Singaporean officials ought to have considered the effect of their condemnation on the Burmese regime, which had become embittered toward ASEAN, Yao said. When we asked how the crackdown might affect the upcoming ASEAN Summit, Yao said that ASEAN nations needed Burma's participation in order to bestow full legitimacy on the ASEAN Charter. Yao seemed unable to envision other ASEAN nations excluding Burma from signing the Charter or taking other steps to marginalize Burma's status within the organization.

[1](#)4. (C) Noting Yao's prior posting at the PRC Embassy in Jakarta, we asked whether he felt that Indonesia, as ASEAN's largest country, might play a special role in pressing the Burmese regime. Yao doubted Indonesia's ability to assume a

position of leadership on Burma, citing limited leverage over the Burmese. (Yao seemed to assess leverage as flowing principally from economic interaction.) When we asked whether the PRC government nevertheless would like to be able to deflect international pressure relating to Burma from the PRC toward an ASEAN country, Yao indicated he believed China had little to gain by Indonesia's adopting a higher profile on Burma.

CONTACT WITH BURMESE EXILES

15. (C) We asked whether the PRC Embassy in Bangkok was in contact with any Burmese exile groups. Without explicitly denying such contacts, Yao claimed he was personally unaware of meetings between exiles and PRC Embassy officers. He noted many exiles viewed the PRC negatively, and he and his colleagues were inconvenienced by mid-day demonstrations at the PRC Embassy by opponents of the Burmese regime.

VIEW OF USG POLICY

16. (C) Yao asked us to clarify whether the USG preferred stability or change in Burma. We disputed the premise of his question, explaining that the current repressive climate in Burma did not represent stability. Democratization in Burma would be more conducive to stability, we said; we added it also would result in fewer headaches for the PRC. Yao replied that he considered the situation in Burma to have stabilized somewhat in recent days, with the lifting of the government's curfew. He saw the recent meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and Labor Minister Aung Kyi -- as well as the

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Burmese acceptance of an upcoming visit by UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Pinheiro -- as good signs. Yao remarked that, as a neighboring country, China worried about a potential influx of refugees in the event of (increased) turmoil within Burma; the PRC also bore responsibility for protecting a large number of Chinese citizens in the country.

17. (C) Yao said the USG appeared to have used only "sticks" in its recent dealings with Burma; he advised the USG would be more successful if American diplomacy included positive incentives. Consistent with an earlier message to the USG from MFA officials in Beijing (ref A), Yao urged that the USG hold a second bilateral meeting in China with Burmese officials. Such a meeting would help reassure the Burmese and allow them to feel less isolated, Yao said, thereby enabling progress on shared objectives. Drawing on previous guidance from EAP/MLS (ref B), we replied that the Burmese regime's actions after the first meeting in Beijing offered little encouragement for further talks.

PRC'S BURMA POLICY IN CONTEXT OF PARTY CONGRESS

18. (C) Referring to the outcome of China's recent Communist Party Congress, Yao emphasized Secretary General Hu Jintao's newly-espoused view that China was ready to take on more international responsibility. Yao said the PRC would spend the next year examining how it might expand its international role. The key, said Yao, would be understanding the extent of China's capacity to influence other nations. Yao conveyed a low degree of confidence that his government could easily shape the course of events in Burma.

BOYCE